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ABSTRACT

With the advent of the process approach to teaching writing, the use of products or models in the composition classroom has declined, replaced by heuristic exploration of the rhetorical situation, with special emphasis on audience analysis. Some researchers have emphasized the difference between internal audiences and audiences external to the text, while other theorists have focused on the relationship between internal audiences and specific genres. Internal readerships are common in business and technical writing, as well as academic writing--persuasive discourse as well as literary discourse. Internal readers of various types have been the focus of entire schools of literary criticism, especially reader-response critics. For example, in his book on the validity of interpretation, E.D. Hirsch ties interpretation to reader expectations that arise from the interpreter's conception of the "type of meaning" being presented in the text. Not so well studied are the readerships inherent to academic discourse, although their presence seems to be assumed by most theorists. Technical and business writing target readerships through structural conventions. Even persuasion encodes its own image of reader, reflecting the cultural percepts of the time. The prevalence of model readers within genres suggests that models as examples of generic types can be introduced into the writing classroom without sacrificing attention to rhetorical concerns, such as audience. (HOD)

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THE "MODEL" READER: AUDIENCES WITHIN GENRES

Helen Rothschild Ewald

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THE "MODEL" READER: AUDIENCES WITHIN GENRES

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With the advent of the process approach to teaching writing, the use of products or models in the composition classroom has declined. The "fall of models" parallels the "fall of the modes of discourse" so well-documented by Robert Connors.[1] Replacing the study and "imitation" of models has been the heuristic exploration of the rhetorical situation, with special emphasis on audience analysis.

Recent reserach on audience, however, suggests that the analysis of texts may be crucial to a writer's understanding of her readers. Arthur E. Walzer, for example, posits that, for certain kinds of writing, "a writer's audience should be thought of in terms of the conventions of the discourse of a particular rhetorical or interpretive community."[2] Walzer thus recommends analyzing texts rather than audiences in order to document the rhetorical conventions of various discourse types and, in so doing, to discover the points of view held by the interpretive communities tacitly embedded in these types.

The purpose of this paper is to explore the interrelationship between audience and discourse type. More specifically, this paper suggests how distinct readerships inhabit a variety of genres, ranging from the literary to the referential to the persuasive. These readerships are "model" audiences in the sense that they exist within the conventions and constraints represented by generic models. Ultimately, these readerships enable writers to generate reader-based prose.

Audience and Genre: A Brief Critical Overview

Researchers have variously addressed the idea that a text can somehow encode its own readers. Some researchers have emphasized the difference

between such internal audiences and those audiences external to the text. Douglas Park, for instance, bases his four specific meanings of audience on two general ways of perceiving readers: those within the text and those outside the text. Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford similarly tie their discussion of audience to perspectives featuring the "audience invoked" and the "audience addressed."[3]

Other theorists have focused on the relationship between internal audiences and specific genres. Mary Louise Pratt, for example, explores the construct of audience peculiar to literature as a genre. Reader-response critic Gerald Prince examines the image of reader encoded within highly formulaic subgenres, such as the detective story or the romance. James Kinneavy examines the different types of reader implied by the broad genres of science and literature. And Arthur Walzer looks at readerships embodied in academic discourse.[4] In sum, theorists have discovered "model" readers in a number of discourse types. These theorists have also barred certain types from discussion. Walzer, for instance, maintains that business and technical writing do not readily admit built-in readerships. And Kinneavy states that writers can "forget [the external audience] and let discourse speak for itself" in every type of discourse except persuasion.

The discussion which follows, however, shows how internal readerships occupy business and technical writing, as well as academic writing; persuasive discourse as well as literary discourse.

Literary Discourse

In Validity of Interpretation, E.D. Hirsch establishes the decisive role that genre plays in literary interpretation. Specifically, Hirsch ties interpretation to reader expectations which arise from the

interpreter's conception of the "type of meaning" being presented in the text. This type of meaning involves not only common elements such as message or theme, but also a number of elements external to the text, including the relationship "assumed to exist between the speaker and interpreter." Hirsch further observes that without helpful guideposts such as titles and attributions, real readers are "likely to gain widely different generic conceptions of a text, an these conceptions will be constitutive of their subsequent understanding." To support this contention, Hirsch relates how the incorrect reading of the title "A Valediction Forbidding Mourning" made his students completely misinterpret Donne's poem. Because of the word "mourning" in the title, his students remained convinced that the poem was about death, although it is "almost certainly about a temporary physical absence, and the speaker is almost certainly not a dying man."[5] Obviously, Hirsch's students were not part of that community of readers which would recognize a valediction as something said upon parting--as in "God bless you" or "Break a leg"--and would thus expect to discover in the poem what good wishes or admonitions the speaker had for his departing listener.

Readers belonging to an interpretive community, on the other hand, are able to recognize generic markers and to subsequently interpret the parts of a text in terms of its generic whole. For such a community, a generic marker such as "Once upon a time" forecasts a fairy tale, not an analysis of President Reagan's budget. Similarly, an analysis of Reagan's budget with the subtitle "once upon a time" forecasts a certain type of report; an analysis with the subtitle "once upon a time" by a fiscally conservative author predicts another type. In each case, generic markers set forth distinct expectations and, in turn, set up different writer-reader

relationships. Moreover, the generic form itself, be it fairy tale, satiric broadside, or nostalgic editorial, embodies its own "model" readership which expects to gain a certain type of knowledge from that particular kind of discourse.

It is not our purpose here to show in detail the kinds of readerships embodied in various literary subgenres. It is interesting to note, however, that internal readers of various types have been the focus of entire schools of literary criticism, including that of reader-response critics.

Academic Discourse

Not so well-studied are the readerships inherent in academic discourse. Academic discourse, any form of writing which inductively or deductively supports a thesis, can however feature interesting uses of built-in readers. In the article "The Phenomenology of Error," for example, Joseph Williams uniquely uses the readership of the College Composition and Communication journal to make his point. Williams' thesis is that to perceive errors in a text, readers must be consciously looking for them. Williams tacitly assumes that the CCC readership will be reading his article for meaning and not for error, and thus will not notice any miscues present in the text. Even though this readership is used to spotting errors in students' papers, it is not used to seeing them in professional journals, in general, and in the CCC, in particular. At the end of the article, Williams reveals that the article contains about 100 deliberate miscues and guesses that only a few of these, if any, will have been noticed by his readers.[6] (Personally, I had recognized only one miscue and had assumed it was a misprint.) Thus, Williams proves his point about error deductively throuh textual arguments and inductively through the inherent reading habits of the academic

readership.

Although readerships in academic discourse are not well-studied, their presence seems to be assumed by most theorists--and by many writers as well.

Technical and Business Writing

Technical and business writing, as types of referential discourse, are not generally viewed as having built-in readerships. Walzer, in fact, excludes technical and business writing from the sort of writing that should be studied in terms of its internal audiences. Nevertheless, this writing does employ these readerships, especially through structural conventions.

The various sections of a technical report, for example, embody separate readerships, and each section is designed around the kind of knowledge each respective audience expects to gain from reading that part. Houp and Pearsall's discussion of technical report elements is particularly interesting in this regard. Although the authors associate audience factors with actual readers, Houp and Pearsall base the selection of structural elements not on the needs of such real readers, but on the requirements of various types of reports. In other words, they base the selection on the expectations of model audiences. For instance, the authors state that the way a writer ends a report depends on the sort of report she is writing. A "decision report," such as a feasibility study or an environmental statement, always concludes with a set of recommendations. Other kinds of reports conclude with solution statements, summaries, or complimentary closes.[7] In each case, the report's ending fulfills the constraints of the type of report involved and, more importantly, fulfills the expectations of the model reader embodied within that type.

Business messages similarly imply certain readerships within certain structures. A negative message, for example, features a buffered opening, even though an actual reader might immediately recognize from this opening that she is in line for some bad news. The main function of the buffer, therefore, is not to disguise or to somehow put off or even to soften the bad news; it is to establish the letter as a specific type. The audience embodied in that type then reads the message not so much to learn of the bad news as to learn of the reasons for the bad news. Specifically, when the program chair for the College Composition and Communication Conference rejects a paper proposal, she buffers that rejection with information regarding the number of proposals received, the criteria for selecting diversified presenters, and other constraints which inform the program's make-up. The inclusion of this information, to be sure, has more than just an explanatory function. It serves to assure the proposer that her proposal received careful consideration and may have been rejected for reasons other than its own merit; it also encourages the proposer to attend the conference anyway and to consider submitting another proposal in the future. In other words, the inclusion has both an informative and a persuasive purpose. It is interesting to note here that the informative function seems to assume a model reader, while the persuasive function assumes a real reader--the rejected proposer.

Persuasive Discourse

Persuasion itself is commonly associated with real readers. However, in at least one sense, persuasion seems particularly suited to model audiences in that its constraints are ultimately based on the rhetorician's image of man. This image embodies a community of listeners sharing the same charactertraits. These traits inform the persuasive strategies

involved in various types of argument. The structure of classical argument, for instance, relies on a rational model reader. This reader expects to be confronted with both sides of an argument, with one side eventually losing out. The structure of the classical argument reflects the model reader in its organizational elements: concession, presentation, refutation, and solution or conclusion.[8] The model audience embodied in this form of argument expects to discover which side is best.

However, the structure of the modern argument, sometimes called Rogerian argument, relies on an affective reader. This reader, threatened by opposing points of view, expects to be recognized and respected before she can even consider another's viewpoint. The strategy of the modern or Rogerian argument is thus "designed not to win but to increase communication in both directions."[9] The strategy features an introduction which describes the opposing position in detail, to eliminate any suspicion on the part of the model reader that she is misunderstood, and continues with a statement of "shared goals." The type of knowledge expected by such a model reader is thus some kind of consensus, based--in part--on her beliefs.

Even persuasion, then, appears to encode its own image of reader. Interestingly, the image of reader described above reflects the cultural percepts of the time.

Conclusion

A survey of the relationship between audience and discourse type suggests, then, that:

1. Model audiences inhabit a wider range of genres than has been believed; business and technical writing as well as persuasive discourse embody such audiences.

2. Model audiences often appear tied to structural constraints.
3. These audiences can reflect, as in persuasion, a society's underlying assumptions about mankind.
4. The fulfillment of readership expectations corresponds with the fulfillment of genre expectations.

These findings have pedagogical implications for the teacher of writing. The prevalence of model readers within genres suggests that models as examples of generic types can be introduced into the composition class without sacrificing attention to rhetorical concerns, such as audience. In fact, the models, themselves, embody concerns. The trick is to show how various generic conventions and constraints fulfill the expectations of their embedded readers. To use models in such a way is not to move away from the process approach to teaching writing, but is to make readerships, as embodied in their associated genres, the focal point of that process. The heuristic developed to study readerships within texts could then be used as a heuristic for generating texts for these readerships. Such a heuristic would follow the precedent set by Burke's Pentad, which was originally developed as a critic's tool for analyzing texts and is now widely used as a heuristic for generating them. In any case, this heuristic would most probably lead to a refined definition of reader-based prose, a definition based on the expectations of model audiences.

NOTES

[1] "The Rise and Fall of the Modes of Discourse," College Composition and Communication, XXXII (December 1981), 444-455.

[2] "Articles from the 'California Divorce Project': A Case Study of the Concept of Audience," College Composition and Communication, XXXVI (May 1985), 155-158.

[3] Cf. Douglas B. Park, "The Meanings of 'Audience,'" College English, 44 (March 1982), 250; Lisa Ede and Andrea Lunsford, "Audience Addressed/Audience Invoked: The Role of Audience in Composition Theory and Pedagogy," College Composition and Communication, XXXV (May 1984), 156.

[4] Cf. Mary Louise Pratt, Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977); Gerald Prince, "Introduction to the Study of the Narratee," in Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post Structuralism, ed. Jane P. Tompkins (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 7-25, and "Notes on the Text as Reader," in The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation, ed. Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crosman (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 225-240; James L. Kinneavy, A Theory of Discourse (New York: W.W. Norton and Co. [1971] 1980), pp. 59-61; Walzer, pp. 150-159.

[5] Validity of Interpretation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967), pp. 72-86.

[6] College Composition and Communication, XXXII (May 1981), pp. 152-168. Williams' general observation that we see what we look for, of course, applies to a wide range of readerships.

[7] Kenneth W. Houp and Thomas E. Pearsall, Reporting Technical

Information, 5th ed. (New York: MacMillan Publishing Co., 1984), pp. 149-153, 202-224.

[8] Cicero, of course, thought eloquence should "speak for itself" and thus seems to have imaged a model audience capable of appreciating such eloquence. Not as optimistic, Artistotle--while seeing rhetoric in its purist sense as "statement and proof" and therefore as embodying a model listener cabable of objectively evaluating arguments according to their merits--saw the need for including various types of appeals in arguments based on the often subjective nature of "real" audiences.

[9] See Linda Flower, Problem-Solving Strategies for Writing (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1981), pp. 164-66.